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Religious News

Book Finally Issued Tells Story of '54 CIA Firing

By WARREN HOGE
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In a book first suppressed and now issued, a former CIA intelligence officer claims that the agency arbitrarily fired her 12 years ago to satisfy the whims of the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

In addition, she says, it was agency officials who successfully prevented the sale of the original publication of her account of the incident.

The writer, Sylvia Press, returned to Washington yesterday for the first time in a decade, eager to tell her story but insistent that she is not "anti-CIA."

SYLVIA PRESS

The episode began, she said, one morning in May, 1954, when she received a telephone call directing her to drop everything and report to the agency's internal security division. At the time, she was a 12-year veteran in intelligence work and carried top secret clearance.

Security Investigation

Arriving at the division minutes later, she was confronted by two expressionless men who thrust two other officers' applications for employment at her and asked sternly why she had signed them as a witness.

One signature was hers, the other not, she said, but it didn't matter to her examiners. This initial exchange was typical of the kind of questioning she was to undergo for the next seven weeks, she added.

"Are you accusing me of something," she pleaded repeatedly throughout the next months as her two questioners grilled her from across a long table, she recounted.

"We're not accusing you of anything," they replied icily each time and then resumed their examination, she said.

Convinced of her innocence and consequently cooperative, she became the perfect victim of the star chamber proceeding, she said yesterday.

Questioned about everything from her sex life to the itinerary of a trip to Mexico 15 years earlier, she left no detail out, confident that there was nothing in her past to affect her professional status.

After the July 4 weekend, she reported as she had for the last seven weeks to the bare room in the security division. But that day there was no more questioning. A dismissal form citing her as a "security risk" rested on the table.

She demanded and obtained a meeting with the [illegible]

explained yesterday. "Otherwise I would have just gotten more and more bitter."

In the May Esquire, Malcolm Muggeridge wrote a favorable review, which encouraged Bantam Books, Inc. to issue the book in paperback this last summer.

Miss Press still has little idea why she was singled out. "They didn't like people with intelligence with a small 'i'", she offers as one theory. The fact that she was in Mexico at the time that Leon Trotsky was assassinated was also mentioned by her interrogators, she said, even though no link between her and the crime was ever produced.

Dulles' comment about her lack of candor suggested a third possible reason—that the agency objected to her having lived with a man years before she came to Washington in a common law arrangement as she cites in the book.

Soft-spoken and motherly, Miss Press now can relate her experience with composure. But she hasn't forgotten. "It was a terrible and hideous mistake," she said," and I still hope someday to get a rehearing."